

**God's People Part 2: How We Act
In The Family (Dads)
Ephesians 6:4**

Introduction: Last week, we began a two-part series in our study of Ephesians on parenting.

Paul starts us off by explaining how children are to function within the family, and, not surprisingly, it's exactly how we, as God's Children, are to function in His family. Paul wrote,

1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." (Ephesians 6:1-3)

It's vital that parents understand the instructions Paul gave children in that passage are meant not only to be heard by children but, first and foremost, by parents. If this is how God designed the universe to function, then the rejection, disregarding, or lessening of these instructions by parents would be like a parent finding some way to rationalize that the outcome of their child drinking a deadly poison will somehow not apply to their child! When a child doesn't learn to honor and obey his parents, that child is being groomed for a life of chaos, not only for themselves but for everybody else in their life. Therefore, it is a complete and total dereliction of duty for a parent not to prioritize teaching their children to honor and obey them. There could be nothing more unloving and, frankly, morally reprehensible than a parent who is unwilling to carry the burden of this task.

BUT, how should a parent carry out this vital task? That is, it is absolutely vital for the child, the family, and the future of society that children learn to honor and obey their parents, but that doesn't mean a parent can teach their child to honor and obey them however they want. The Bible is not only bluntly clear about the vital necessity of a child honoring and obeying their parents, but also in how a parent, especially a dad, is supposed to teach their child to honor and obey. Right after Paul gives the instructions to the children, Paul writes this to the dads,

4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Now, before we dig into that verse, it cannot be understated how counter-cultural everything Paul wrote about morality, marriage, and family was. For instance, in commenting on Paul's instructions to children and dads, which are meant to be understood by moms as well, William Barclay provided some very interesting cultural context that once again highlights the stark contrast of God's expectations and instructions with the values and practices of the world Paul was writing in. Barclay wrote,

"If the Christian faith did a great deal for women, it did even more for children. In Roman civilization contemporary with Paul, there existed certain

features which made life dangerous for children. (1) There was the Roman *patria potestas*, the father's power. Under the *patria potestas*, a Roman father had absolute power over his family. He could sell them as slaves; he could make them work in his fields even in chains; he could punish as he liked and could even inflict the death penalty. Further, the power of the Roman father extended over a child's whole life, as long as the father lived. A Roman son never came of age. Even when he was a grown man, even if he were a magistrate of the city, even if the state had crowned him with well-deserved honours, he remained within his father's absolute power. 'The great mistake', writes the classical archaeologist Wilhelm Adolf Becker, 'consisted in the Roman father considering the power which Nature imposes as a duty on the elders, of guiding and protecting a child during infancy, as extending over his freedom, involving his life and death, and continuing over his entire existence.' It is true that the father's power was seldom carried to its limits, because public opinion would not have allowed it; but the fact remains that, in the time of Paul, children were absolutely in their father's power. (2) There was the custom of child exposure. When a child was born, it was placed at its father's feet; and, if the father stooped and lifted the child, that meant that he acknowledged it and wanted to keep it. If he turned and walked away, it meant that he refused to acknowledge it, and the child could quite literally be thrown out. There is a letter whose date is 1 BC from a man called Hilarion to his wife Alis. He has gone to Alexandria, and he writes home on domestic affairs: 'Hilarion to Alis his wife heartiest greetings, and to my dear Berous and Apollonariion. Know that we are still even now in Alexandria. Do not worry if when all others return I remain in Alexandria. I beg and beseech of you to take care of the little child, and, as soon as we receive wages, I will send them to you. If—good luck to you!—you have a child, if it is a boy, let it live; if it is a girl, throw it out. You told Aphrodisias to tell me: 'Do not forget me.' How can I forget you? I beg you therefore not to worry.' It is a strange letter, so full of affection and yet so callous towards the child who may be born. A Roman baby always ran the risk of being rejected and exposed. In the time of Paul, that risk was even greater. We have seen how the marriage bond had collapsed and how men and women changed their partners with bewildering rapidity. Under such circumstances, a child was a misfortune. So few children were born that the Roman government actually passed legislation that the amount of any legacy that a childless couple could receive was limited. It was the custom that unwanted children were left in the Roman forum. There they became the property of anyone who cared to pick them up. They were collected at night by people who looked after them in order to sell them as slaves or to stock the brothels of Rome. (3) Ancient civilization was merciless to the sickly or deformed child. Seneca writes: 'We slaughter a fierce ox; we strangle a mad dog; we plunge the knife into sickly cattle lest they taint the herd; children who are born weakly and deformed we drown.' Children who were weak or imperfectly formed had little hope of survival. It was against this situation that Paul wrote his advice to children and parents. If ever we are asked what good

Christianity has done to the world, we need only point to the change brought about in the status of women and of children.”¹

With that, it’s fairly easy to notice how Ephesians 6:4 is structured. There is a statement of what dads should not do, followed by a statement of what dads should do.

Proposition: Ephesians 6:4 gives two instructions to dads, and by implication, moms as well, concerning how they should parent their children.

The first instruction is what NOT to do.

(1) Do not create or fuel LOGICAL reasons for your children to be angry, bitter people. – (6:4a)

A. “4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger.”

B. This statement is massive, given the culture of cold, severe parenting, particularly among dads, in which Paul was writing this letter. It also speaks volumes to Christians who attempt to rationalize unethical parenting practices with the predictable biblical consequences of a child who doesn’t learn to honor and obey his parents. That is, this statement of what not to do not only confronts the cultural values and methods prevalent in Paul’s day, but also the potentially errant position of Christian parents who confuse themselves with God, either in His exclusive ability to accomplish all that He wills or in the eternal holiness of all that He does!

C. There are two key words in this part of the verse—“provoke” and “anger”. Before we go any further into an explanation of those terms, it’s important to notice the context of the word “anger.” “Anger” is not given a specific direction, as in don’t provoke your kids to be angry at you, your wife, or their teacher, but rather, don’t provoke your children to live in a constant present-tense state of anger. Anger is a human emotion that God himself has. There are certain things that it would be sinful not to feel angry about—i.e., injustice. It’s what we do with anger that can present a problem, and it’s why Paul told us in Ephesians 4:26 not to sin when we get angry. But, to the point here, Paul is in no way saying don’t do anything that makes your kid angry. That’s impossible nor practical. So what is he saying?

D. Well, the phrase, “provoke to anger,” is actually one word in the Greek, meaning it can only be properly understood and applied if you understand and apply it as one cohesive principle. He’s not saying don’t provoke, because that would remove all efforts at leadership. He’s also not saying don’t do something that makes your kid angry; sometimes it’s necessary to do and say things our children might feel angry about, just as God does things that are necessary in the

¹ Barclay, W. (2002). [*The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*](#) (pp. 202–204). Westminster John Knox Press.

accomplishment of His will and our good that we can't understand or lack the faith to trust Him in that make us angry! What he's saying is don't continue behavior, attitudes, and actions that knowingly cause your child to become a bitter, angry child.

1. "provoke to anger" is one Greek word. -παροργίζω (*parorgizō*): "(derivative of παροργισμός 'anger,' 88.176) to cause someone to become provoked or quite angry—to cause to be provoked, to make angry."²
 2. "The parallel passage (Col. 3:21) has: "Fathers, do not exasperate your children," meaning: "Do not embitter them or stir them up." There is very little essential difference between that and "Do not provoke your children to anger." The cognate noun is "angry mood" (4:26)."³
 3. "They are not to excite the bad passions of their children ..."⁴
 4. "We start with the negative, 'Provoke not your children to wrath'. These words can be translated, 'Do not exasperate your children, do not irritate your children, do not provoke your children to become resentful'. "⁵
- E. R.J. Utley adds a note that provides important clarity about what this command teaches parents not to do. Utley notes, **"do not provoke' This is a PRESENT ACTIVE IMPERATIVE with the NEGATIVE PARTICLE which usually means to stop an act already in process."**⁶ The idea is that, as a Dad, and again, obviously to moms as well, if something is having the effect of driving my child further and further into a bitter, angry, rebellious heart, then I need to stop what I'm doing and assess my motives and methods so that I don't keep doing things that are pushing them further into darkness rather than light! As with everything in the Bible, I should never compromise by belief in sound doctrine, nor should I ever justify or affirm immoral or unethical behavior, but beyond that, I need to love my children more than methods and as such have the wisdom to stop doing things I can stop doing that are driving my children further from God rather than closer to Him!
- F. The following are some thoughts from conservative commentators on how we "provoke" children to "anger":

² Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). In [*Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 760). United Bible Societies.

³ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). [*Exposition of Ephesians*](#) (Vol. 7, pp. 261–262). Baker Book House.

⁴ Hodge, C. (1858). [*A commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*](#) (p. 359). Robert Carter and Brothers.

⁵ Lloyd-Jones, D. M. (1974). [*Life in the Spirit in Marriage, Home and Work: An Exposition of Ephesians 5:18–6:9*](#) (p. 277). The Banner of Truth Trust.

⁶ Utley, R. J. (1997). [*Paul Bound, the Gospel Unbound: Letters from Prison \(Colossians, Ephesians and Philemon, then later, Philippians\)*](#): Vol. Volume 8 (p. 135). Bible Lessons International.

1. "They are not to excite the bad passions of their children by severity, injustice, partiality, or unreasonable exercise of authority."⁷
2. "**provoke not**—irritate not, by vexatious commands, unreasonable blame, and uncertain temper [ALFORD]. Col 3:21, 'lest they be discouraged.'"⁸
3. "Parents, on the other hand, are exhorted not to irritate their children by unreasonable severity. This would excite hatred, and would lead them to throw off the yoke altogether. Accordingly, in writing to the Colossians, he adds, "lest they be discouraged." (Col. 3:21.)"⁹
4. "Some ways in which parents may become guilty of this error in bringing up their children: 1. *By over-protection*. The fathers—and mothers too—are so fearful that harm may befall their darlings that they fence them in from every direction ... the over-protective attitude has the tendency of depriving the children of confidence and of instilling in them the angry mood, especially when they compare themselves with other children who are not receiving this special treatment. 2. *By favoritism*. Isaac favored Esau above Jacob. Rebekah preferred Jacob (Gen. 25:28). The sad results of such partiality are well known. 3. *By discouragement*. Example taken from life: "Dad, I am going to study hard and become a doctor," or perhaps a lawyer, teacher, mechanic, minister, or whatever it was the boy had in mind. Dad's answer: "You might as well forget about that. That will never happen anyway." 4. *By failure to make allowance for the fact that the child is growing up, has a right to have ideas of his own, and need not be an exact copy of his father to be a success*. 5. *By neglect*. In the quarrel between David and his son Absalom was the fault *entirely* on Absalom's side? Was not David also partly to blame because he neglected his son? (2 Sam. 14:13, 28). 6. *By bitter words and outright physical cruelty*. Here is a father who loves to throw his weight around and to make use of his superior strength."¹⁰
5. "*Do not provoke your children to anger* (verse 4), or 'do not exasperate your children' (NIV) or 'goad your children to resentment' (NEB). Paul recognizes how delicate a child's personality is. Some authors have speculated that in his own childhood he was comparatively deprived of love, and that in this instruction to parents there is a flashback to some early childhood reminiscence. We do not know. What we do know is that parents can easily misuse their authority either by making irritating or unreasonable demands which make no allowances for the inexperience and immaturity of children,

⁷ Hodge, C. (1858). [*A commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*](#) (p. 359). Robert Carter and Brothers.

⁸ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). [*Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 356). Logos Research Systems, Inc.

⁹ Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). [*Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*](#) (p. 328). Logos Bible Software.

¹⁰ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). [*Exposition of Ephesians*](#) (Vol. 7, pp. 261–262). Baker Book House.

or by harshness and cruelty at one extreme or by favouritism and over-indulgence at the other, or by humiliating or suppressing them, or by those two vindictive weapons, sarcasm and ridicule. These are some of the parental attitudes that provoke resentment and anger in children. How many 'angry young men', hostile to society at large, have learned their hostility as children in an unsympathetic home? There is a place for discipline, as Paul goes on to say, but it must never be arbitrary (for children have a built-in sense of justice) or unkind. Otherwise, they will 'become discouraged'. Conversely, almost nothing causes a child's personality to blossom and gifts to develop like the positive encouragement of loving, understanding parents. Indeed, just as a husband's love for his wife is expressed in helping her develop her full potential, so parents' love for their children is expressed in helping them develop theirs. ... Behind this curbing of parental authority there lies the clear recognition that, although children are to obey their parents in the Lord, yet they have a life and personality of their own. They are little people in their own right. As such they are to be respected, and on no account to be exploited, manipulated or crushed. 'The dominant father of the Victorian novels', writes Sir Frederick Catherwood, 'who used his own authority for his own ends is no more entitled to claim Christian authority than the rebellious son. One is abusing authority, the other is flouting it. Both are wrong.'"¹¹

- G.** The following are practical examples of how parents can provoke their children to anger:

1. Inconsistent rules and consequences.

Note: Examples include when what was allowed last week is arbitrarily given consequences this week, or when what was allowed for one child is not allowed for them. Inconsistency creates instability, and instability can quickly lead to bitterness and anger.

2. Unapproachability.

Note: The most obvious form of this is when your kids can't talk about things because they are not invited or allowed to share their disagreements or perspectives. This can happen overtly by telling our kids that their opinions are not wanted or welcome, or inadvertently through our lack of constructive, objective engagement. This is not to say there aren't circumstances in which a parent shouldn't discuss matters, but if the parent develops a culture that matters can never be discussed, anger and bitterness could understandably be provoked. Unapproachability can also be preached if we act as if we have no faults, especially when we refuse to openly repent of obvious ones. When we live like that, we tell our child that who we are is

¹¹ Stott, J. R. W. (1979). [*God's new society: the message of Ephesians*](#) (p. 246). InterVarsity Press.

totally unattainable to them, and thus unapproachable. This can understandably create bitterness and anger as they try to live up to an unattainable standard you set for them.

3. Helicopter parenting.

Note: A child who is never allowed to explore their ideas and dreams can very likely grow weary, exhausted, and bitter. Furthermore, some of the best learning occurs in the wise assessment of failure. However, if a parent never lets a child do something they might fail at, then the parent is not only removing them from one of the greatest opportunities to develop knowledge, wisdom, and emotional intelligence, but also creating understandable motivation for bitterness and anger at never being allowed to be their own person.

4. Emotional immaturity.

Note: Children who grow up with emotionally immature parents live in constant drama, relational instability, and unpredictable results. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand how this can completely exhaust a child and fuel all kinds of anger and bitterness.

5. Neglect.

Note: Neglect comes in all kinds of forms, but in every instance, it fuels anger and bitterness. A parent can emotionally neglect a child by not demonstrating their love for the child, prioritizing time with the child, or affirming the child's efforts at success. A parent can also neglect a child by failing to discipline them. A child who is never disciplined will eventually feel that their parents didn't care enough to help them grow into a responsible, productive, physically and spiritually healthy adult.

6. Punishment instead of discipline.

Note: We are going to talk more about discipline in a minute, but for now, it's important to know that when consequences lack the understandable purpose of correction, or worse, the consequences are clearly nothing more than the emotional reaction of the parent's pride being wounded, then a parent shouldn't be shocked if they are fueling anger and bitterness in their children.

7. Spoiling.

Note: A parent who spoils a child provides them with an overabundance of ease and gives them gifts that should be rewards. It's also done by consistently protecting them from the weight and experience of the

consequences of their actions, other people's actions, and life. The ironic result is that spoiling a child creates a sense of entitlement in the child that eventually provokes anger and bitterness towards the parents, society, and even God for not giving them what they want or for experiencing consequences.

- H.** In 2 Samuel 13-18, we find one of the classic Biblical examples of provoking a child to anger. Unfortunately, it's seen in how David parented his adult children, particularly Absalom. One of David's sons, Amnon, raped one of David's daughters (Tamar), and David did nothing about it. For two years, Absalom saw the issue ignored until, finally, David's neglect of Tamar and Amnon's spoiling fueled so much bitterness and anger in Absalom that he took matters into his own hands and executed Amnon. However, instead of David owning the fact that he fueled Absalom's response with his neglect and spoiling, he acted as if Absalom didn't even exist. Absalom lived in exile for three years until Joab arranged circumstances that led David to realize he needed to let Absalom return to Jerusalem. However, even then, David still refused to interact with him. David made himself totally unapproachable to Absalom, all while Absalom was fully aware of the grace and mercy God had shown David in even more egregious sins! David then refused to confront Absalom when he blatantly began undermining his authority and throne, which eventually paved the way for Absalom to lead a coup against David and drive him out of his own city! A few months later, it all ended with Absalom's death. At the end of the day, Absalom unjustly issued the justice his brother deserved and deceitfully undermined and tried to overthrow the God-ordained sovereign ruler of Israel. Both were sinful, rebellious actions by a grown man who is held totally responsible for his actions by God. Nonetheless, it remains true that David's neglect, spoiling, inconsistency, and unapproachability fueled and possibly even created the anger and bitterness within Absalom. David's fault doesn't negate Absalom's, but Absalom's fault doesn't negate David's either. Just like Absalom, David totally failed at what he could control and for which he alone is held accountable by God.

The second instruction is what TO do.

(2) Continually labor with God in what HE's doing in your kids. (6:4b)

Note: **"but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."**

- A. Dads (and moms) are meant to equip children to properly experience God, relationships, and life by parenting them with the same method and purpose that GOD parents His children.**
1. Notice that the discipline and instruction we are supposed to bring our children up in, that is the experience of being disciplined and the experience of being instructed is the discipline and instruction that belongs to the Lord

(“of the Lord”), and thus matches the methods and purpose of what God is doing in all of His people! Therefore, before we talk about how we should be good dads (and obviously good moms as well), we need to first make sure we understand what God is doing in all His kids!

2. “The discipline and instruction in which parents are to bring up their children, Paul writes, are ‘the Lord’s’. This has been taken by some to mean simply that the kind of instruction and discipline intended ‘belong to a Christian upbringing’ (NEB), and that Paul is specifying Christian as opposed to secular education. But I think it means more than this, namely that behind the parents who teach and discipline their children there stands the Lord himself. It is he who is the chief teacher and administrator of discipline. Certainly the overriding concern of Christian parents is not just that their children will submit to their authority, but that through this they will come to know and obey the Lord. There is always much rejoicing and thanksgiving whenever the teaching and discipline of a Christian home leads, not artificially but naturally, to a child’s acceptance of the teaching and discipline of the Lord Jesus himself.”¹²

B. The Gospel makes it clear that God “parents” all His kids:

1. Through a committed, continual **PROCESS** (sanctification).
 - a. **18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)**
 - b. **6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:6)**
 - c. **14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. (Hebrews 10:14)**
2. By ensuring we grow in our ability to abundantly **EXPERIENCE** His life in every circumstance (Discipline).
 - a. **1 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. (John 15:1-2)**
 - b. **2 Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.**

¹² Stott, J. R. W. (1979). [*God's new society: the message of Ephesians*](#) (pp. 249–250). InterVarsity Press.

3 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Romans 5:2-5)

- c. 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:4)
 - d. 11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, 12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:11-12)
 - e. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)
3. Through the correct KNOWLEDGE and application of the Bible and the Gospel, it's about (Instruction).
- a. 20 But that is not the way you learned Christ!—21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, 22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:20-24)
 - b. 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
 - c. 1 Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. 2 For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. 3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, 5 not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you.

7 For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. 8 Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you. (1 Thessalonians 4:1-8)

- d. 3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, (2 Peter 1:3)**

C. Practically, Ephesians 6:4 means dads (and moms) should:

1. Treat parenting as a continual PROCESS, not an instance.

- a. “... but bring them up ...”**
- b.** This imperative command applies to both discipline and instruction. Both are implemented not as an event but in an ongoing, intentional, calculated, objectively evaluated, and continually measured process that God Himself is doing in our children and us as well. It is not a reaction that happened to be good, or a handful of moments in their life that you use to try and prove to yourself and your children that you are a good parent, despite the fact that there is little to no evidence that you are committed to a process for them to know and experience God and His life. Parenting is a daily process!
- c.** This also emphasizes that the process is not the point, but the goal is the point, and that goal is to be “of the Lord.” Remember, if we are implementing the discipline and instruction that belongs to the Lord, then we are striving to achieve the purpose and goal that His discipline and instruction are intended to accomplish, which is to bring us into glad submission to Him so we can experience God and His life forever! The process of how we get there is not the point; Jesus is the point, but we are commanded by God to use the process of discipline and instruction that He uses with His kids (us), with our kids.
- d.** “This is a PRESENT ACTIVE IMPERATIVE which comes from the same word root, “to feed to maturity,” as in 5:29. As it is the husband’s responsibility to continue to help his wife grow to spiritual maturity and giftedness, he is also to help his children reach their full spiritual maturity and giftedness (cf. 4:7).”¹³
- e.** “‘Bring up’ is *ektrephō* (ἐκτρέφω), ‘to nourish up to maturity, to nurture, bring up, to rear up.’ The word is not confined to the nourishing of a

¹³ Utley, R. J. (1997). [*Paul Bound, the Gospel Unbound: Letters from Prison \(Colossians, Ephesians and Philemon, then later, Philippians\)*](#): Vol. Volume 8 (p. 135). Bible Lessons International.

child physically, but includes its bringing up or rearing in the various departments of its life.”¹⁴

- f. “The verb (*ektrephō*) means literally to ‘nourish’ or ‘feed’ and was used in 5:29 of the nourishment we give to our own bodies. But it is also used of the upbringing of children. ... parents need to take time and trouble with their children. Failure to do so causes many problems later. As Dr Lloyd-Jones pertinently observes, ‘If parents but gave as much thought to the rearing of their children as they do to the rearing of animals and flowers, the situation would be very different.’”¹⁵

2. Develop the DISCIPLINE within their children that enables them to experience life and relationships as God designed.

- a. “... but bring them up in the discipline ... of the Lord.”
- b. Discipline is not a process but a character trait. Discipline is the ability to endure and stay steadfast. Discipline is the ability to stay on task, working towards the goal that matters most. Discipline is the ability to do what’s right even when it doesn’t appear to matter. Discipline is the ability to do what’s right even when we don’t feel like doing it. Therefore, to bring a child up in the discipline that belongs to the Lord means to bring them up in the moral character that belongs to the Lord!
- c. Now, the process of creating discipline in our children requires us to be disciplined in how we create it in them. Disciplining our children certainly includes issuing consequences, but it’s far more than that. Disciplining our children means leading them into and through circumstances and life in ways that intentionally help them grow and mature.
- d. For instance, as we saw in John 15, God’s discipline includes pruning us even when we get things right. A great Coach doesn’t make practice easier as you get better; he makes it more difficult because you’re now capable of being even better! Therefore, to bring a child up in the discipline that belongs to the Lord means we need to help our children see failure as failure, learn to own it, and the consequences it creates, as well as how to endure and achieve success with the burden and weight of responsibility and unwanted and even unmerited circumstances in our way.

¹⁴ Wuest, K. S. (1997). [*Wuest’s word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader*](#) (Vol. 4, p. 137). Eerdmans.

¹⁵ Stott, J. R. W. (1979). [*God’s new society: the message of Ephesians*](#) (pp. 247-248). InterVarsity Press.

- e. Furthermore, bringing a child up in the discipline that belongs to the Lord means I must show them grace and mercy, but that can't be done if there is no context for it to be understood. Grace is the reward of something not achieved, and mercy is the withholding of a consequence that is. Therefore, if there is never an expectation and reward for genuine achievement, nor real consequences for failure, there can never be an understanding or appreciation for grace or mercy, and thus no chance of growing up in the discipline that belongs to the Lord.
- f. *"the discipline and instruction of the Lord.* The second word (*nouthesia*), whether translated 'instruction' or 'warning', seems to refer primarily to verbal education, while the first word (*paideia*) means training by discipline, even by punishment. ... *Paideia (discipline)* is training with the accent on the correction of the young.' It is the word used in Hebrews 12 both of earthly fathers and also of our heavenly Father who 'disciplines us for our good'."¹⁶
- g. "In Heb. 12:11 this word "discipline" refers to "chastening," which, though at the time when it is administered may not be pleasant, is appreciated afterward and produces excellent fruit. Cf. 1 Cor. 11:32; 2 Cor. 6:9; 2 Tim. 2:25. In 2 Tim. 3:16 this "discipline" is the *"training in righteousness."* "Discipline," accordingly, may be described as training by means of rules and regulations, rewards, and when necessary, punishments. It refers primarily to *what is done to the child.*"¹⁷
- h. "...refers to the parental training of children (cf. Heb. 12:5, 7, 8, 11) and for the Lord's training of believers (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16)."¹⁸
- i. "We read countless passages in the Old Testament that warn against a latitudinarian spirit by which parents are so permissive that they refuse to discipline unruly children. Remember the statement that the parent who will not discipline his child, hates the child (Proverbs 13:24). Parents, when they are disciplining their children, often say, 'This hurts me more than it hurts you.' That really is true. There are times when parents find it extremely difficult to discipline their children because they don't want to alienate the children and they don't want to put up with the tears that may follow from disciplinary action. But when they just allow children to do whatever they want, without any discipline and without any instruction, they are loving themselves rather than their children."¹⁹

¹⁶ Stott, J. R. W. (1979). *God's new society: the message of Ephesians* (p. 248). InterVarsity Press.

¹⁷ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). *Exposition of Ephesians* (Vol. 7, p. 262). Baker Book House.

¹⁸ Utley, R. J. (1997). *Paul Bound, the Gospel Unbound: Letters from Prison (Colossians, Ephesians and Philemon, then later, Philippians)*: Vol. Volume 8 (p. 135). Bible Lessons International.

¹⁹ Sproul, R. C. (1994). *The Purpose of God: Ephesians* (p. 140). Christian Focus Publications.

- j. “On the need for discipline and punishment the Old Testament was clear. ‘He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.’ Again, ‘Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.’ Of course our Victorian ancestors used these verses from Proverbs to justify their excessively stern discipline. In our generation, on the other hand, we have witnessed an over-reaction leading to excessively *laissez-faire* permissiveness. To the one extreme we need to say: ‘The opposite of wrong discipline is not the absence of discipline, but right discipline, true discipline.’ To the other extreme we need to say: ‘The opposite of no discipline at all is not cruelty, it is balanced discipline, it is controlled discipline.’⁶ Above all, parents must be clear about their motives. It is always dangerous for them to discipline their children when they are annoyed, when their pride has been injured, or when they have lost their temper. Let me quote Dr Lloyd-Jones again, for his exposition of these verses is full of practical wisdom: ‘When you are disciplining a child, you should have first controlled yourself ... What right have you to say to your child that he needs discipline when you obviously need it yourself? Self-control, the control of temper, is an essential prerequisite in the control of others.’”²⁰

3. Ensure children are properly informed, affirmed, and corrected, especially in and with the Gospel (INSTRUCTION).

- a. “... but bring them up in the ... instruction of the Lord.”
- b. “‘instruction’ - general term for warning, correction or admonition (cf. 1 Cor. 10:11; Titus 3:10). The training of children in the faith was a major emphasis of Judaism (cf. Deut. 4:9; 6:7–9, 20–25; 11:18–21; 32:46). Parental training recognizes the necessity of passing on the personal faith and the Scriptural truths of God, not the personal preferences or cultural opinions of parents, to the next generation.”²¹
- c. “[instruction] is *nouthesia* (νουθεσια), ‘exhortation, admonition.’ Trench says of this word, ‘it is a training by word—by the word of encouragement, when that is sufficient, but also by that of remonstrance, of reproof, of blame, where these may be required, as set over against the training by act and discipline which is *paideia* (παιδεια).’”²²

²⁰ Stott, J. R. W. (1979). [*God's new society: the message of Ephesians*](#) (pp. 248–249). InterVarsity Press.

²¹ Utley, R. J. (1997). [*Paul Bound, the Gospel Unbound: Letters from Prison \(Colossians, Ephesians and Philemon, then later, Philippians\)*](#): Vol. Volume 8 (p. 135). Bible Lessons International.

²² Wuest, K. S. (1997). [*Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader*](#) (Vol. 4, p. 137). Eerdmans.

- d. “[instruction] is the act of reminding one of his faults or duties.”²³
- e. The meaning of the word rendered “[instruction]” appears from 1 Cor. 10:11, “These things were written for our *admonition*,” and from Titus 3:10, “After the first and second *warning* (or: admonition) have nothing to do with a factious person.” “Admonition” is therefore prevailingly training by means of the spoken word, whether that word be teaching, warning, or encouragement. It refers primarily to *what is said to the child*. “Admonition” would seem to be somewhat milder than “discipline.” Nevertheless, it must be earnest, not just a feeble observation such as, “No, my sons; it is not a good report that I hear” (1 Sam. 2:24). In fact, it is distinctly reported that Eli “did not admonish them [his sons]” (1 Sam. 3:13).²⁴
- f. “And as Christianity is the only true religion, and God in Christ the only true God, the only possible means of profitable education is the nurture and admonition of the Lord. That is, the whole process of instruction and discipline must be that which he prescribes, and which he administers, so that his authority should be brought into constant and immediate contact, with the mind, heart and conscience of the child. It will not do for the parent to present himself as the ultimate end, the source of knowledge and possessor of authority to determine truth and duty.”²⁵

Summary: Be committed to a consistent process of parenting that seeks to develop a personal desire and ability within your children to live a self-sustainable, loving, holy, emotionally mature, life of EXCELLENCE with God, you, and others.

“It is improper, in this connection, to overlook the fact that according to this passage (and cf. Deut. 6:7) not the state or society in general or even the church is *primarily* responsible for the training of the youth, though all of them have a vital interest in it and also a measure of responsibility with respect to it. But *under God* the child *belongs* first of all and most of all to the parents. It is they who should see to it that as far as they can help it those agencies that exert the most potent influence upon the child’s rearing are definitely Christian. The very heart of Christian nurture is this: to bring the heart of the child to the heart of his Savior.”²⁶

Challenge: WHO is your parenting pointing your kids towards—you, themselves, society, or Christ?

²³ Hodge, C. (1858). [*A commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*](#) (pp. 359–360). Robert Carter and Brothers.

²⁴ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). [*Exposition of Ephesians*](#) (Vol. 7, p. 262). Baker Book House.

²⁵ Hodge, C. (1858). [*A commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*](#) (p. 360). Robert Carter and Brothers.

²⁶ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). [*Exposition of Ephesians*](#) (Vol. 7, p. 263). Baker Book House.

If it's you, then you are not only teaching them to live dependent on you, but also to live for your affirmation and approval.

If it's themselves, then you're teaching them to live a narcissistic life submitted to their own wants and desires.

If it's society, then you're teaching them to live for the unattainable affirmation and approval of something that changes faster than the weather, and in the end has no love or concern for your children other than what it can get from them.

If it is Christ, then you are teaching them to live for the only eternally glorious, all-powerful one that is totally unknowable and even unapproachable by our own merits, but who has affirmed through His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension that we are fully and eternally loved, affirmed, and favored by God forever! If we are pointing them to Christ, then we are pointing them to the only One who can and will empower them with God's eternal life in every circumstance; the only one who can be trusted no matter what; the only one truly worthy and worth living our lives in total glad submission to!

"How is this to be done? ... Once more we must go back to chapter 5, verse 18. 'Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit'. That is always the key. We saw when we were dealing with that verse that the life lived in the Spirit, the life of a man who is filled with the Spirit, is characterized always by two main things—power and control. It is a disciplined power. Remember how Paul puts it in writing to Timothy. 'God', he says, 'hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love and of a sound mind (discipline)' (2 Timothy 1:8). Not uncontrolled power, but power controlled by love and a sound mind, discipline! That is always the characteristic of the life of a man who is 'filled with the Spirit'."²⁷

²⁷ Lloyd-Jones, D. M. (1974). [*Life in the Spirit in Marriage, Home and Work: An Exposition of Ephesians 5:18–6:9*](#) (p. 278). The Banner of Truth Trust.